

462 ing field; though by far the greater part of their time is spent in listless lounging or heedless slumber under the incidental guard of roaming youths and toiling women. The matrons are the real workers in the tribal hive; they are normally alert and active, passing from one simple task to another, gathering fotsam food along the beach or preparing edibles in the shadow of the jacal, with an eye ever on material possessions and children; they frequently join in hunting excursions of considerable extent; they are the chief manufacturers of apparel, utensils, and tools; and the scions of Castilian caballeros are not infrequently staggered at the sight of half a dozen Seri women "milling" a band of horses, and at intervals leaping on one to kill it with their hands. The masculine drones are the more petted and courted by reason of their swiftness, for during a century or two, at least, the women have far outnumbered their consorts—a disproportion doubtless tending in some respects toward the disintegration of the clan system and, reciprocally, toward the firmer union of the tribe.

[162] [562] One of the most noteworthy extensions of feminine functions among the Seri is toward shamanism. So far as could be ascertained from Mashém and the associated matrons at Costa Rica, it is such beldams as Juana Maria who concoct the arrow "poison", compound both necromantic medicines and curative simples, cast spells on men and things, and even fabricate the stone arrowpoints and counterfeit cartridges; though unhappily the data are neither so full nor so decisive as desirable.

562 623 Conformably with their prominence in proprietary affairs, the Seri matrons seem to exercise formal legislative and judicative functions; for not only do they hold their own councils for the arrangement of the domestic business of the rancherías, but they also participate prominently in the tribal councils (as explained by Mashém); and play important rôles in carrying out the decisions of such councils—as when they cooperate with war parties as decoys, or journey across their bounding desert to spy out the land of the enemy.

674 On the whole, it would appear that the clan organization of the Seri conforms closely with that characteristic of savagery elsewhere, especially among the American aborigines. The social unit is the maternal clan, organized in theory and faith in homage of a beast-god, though defined practically by the ocular consanguinity of birth from a common line of mothers; yet the several units are pretty definitely welded into a tribal aggregate by common feelings, identical interests, and conjugal ties. The most distinctive features brought out by the incomplete investigation are the somewhat exceptional manifestation of property-right in the females, the singularly strong sense of maternal relation, and the apparent prominence of females in shamanistic practices as well as in the tribal councils.

* The agency of the women in applying the arrow "poison" was noted by Hardy, cf. p. 224.